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Book Notes

Timothy A. Hacsí, *Children as Pawns: The Politics of Educational Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. \$39.95 hardcover.

In recent times, education (and school level education in particular) has become a highly politicized topic. Beliefs about what type of schooling is the most effective are permeated with ideological preferences, and serious research into what interventions work best are often ignored as values derived from political, religious and other convictions increasingly govern decision making. Although political campaigns today are not exclusively focused on educational issues, it is rare for politicians to downplay education. Issues such as school vouchers, class size, curriculum content, educational administration and related topics now form a prominent part of the electoral process.

However, as Timothy Hacsí demonstrates in this readable and engaging book, political statements about education are often uninformative, clouded with rhetoric and usually erroneous. While politicians blithely contend that this or that remedy will magically solve the problems facing schools today, few base their opinions on a serious assessment of the facts. In some cases, they allow ideological beliefs to override the facts but, in others, they are just ignorant of the facts. Consequently, sincere commitments to improve education and educational opportunities for children are mired in incorrect knowledge, opinion, bias, ideology and tradition—all the things that modern science is supposed to dispel through careful and rigorous investigation.

Hacsí illustrates his argument by discussing five topics that are often raised in political debates about education. These are the role of preschool education (and particularly the Head Start program) in enhancing educational achievement; the effects of bilingual education; the significance of class size; the issue of social promotion, and finally the question of whether the quality of schools can be improved through the allocation of additional resources. All have featured prominently in recent political debates on education. The book offers a lively overview of these issues

showing that popular views on each of them are based on an astounding lack of scientific evidence. Despite their importance and prominence today, research findings into these issues is largely ignored. On the other hand, despite a huge volume of scientific research into these questions, much of the research is controversial and inconclusive. For example, Hacsí reports that a major GAO review of some 600 published research studies into Head Start found that only 22 could be considered reliable in terms of criteria that Hacsí describes as ' . . . not very strict.' Not surprisingly, the GAO concluded that the evidence for Head Start's effectiveness did not permit final conclusions to be drawn.

Hacsí's book is not only directed at politicians, the media and others who declaim on educational issues with apparent authority, but at the scientific community which has failed to agree criteria, standards and procedures for rigorous investigation. The ineffective way that findings are communicated, and the lack of routine replication designed to test research claims, also impede the development of policies based on scientific research. Hopefully Hacsí's excellent book will not only promote more rigorous research into educational issues but pave the way for the more systematic incorporation of research findings into the policy process.

William H. Tucker, *The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wickliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002. \$34.95 hardcover.

Universities are widely regarded as centers where independent, rigorous research is undertaken free of bias and external influence. However, there has always been a tension between the pursuit of objective knowledge and the desire of external sponsors to fund research designed to promote their own agendas. In recent years, research funding by pharmaceutical and bio-technology firms has resulted in several well publicized cases in which concerns about autonomy and potential conflicts of interest involving university researchers have been expressed. These developments echo earlier concerns about the funding of research perceived to have military implications.

The issue is particular pertinent to social policy research where it is widely recognized that values and beliefs permeate